

rule of the state constitution, also written by duly elected individuals. The Democrats were soundly defeated and had no option but to look to the 1898 elections to reverse the trend of Republican rule.³⁸

Wilmington's African Americans and Fusion

As the political climate swayed within the Fusion breeze, the African American community of Wilmington continued to build upon the foundation established after the Civil War, creating an intricate society filled with clubs and organizations plus an entrepreneurial spirit unlike that found in other North Carolina towns. Despite an exodus movement led by African American George Price Jr. in 1889 and 1890, the city still featured a number of skilled artisans. Word began to filter to the city's black residents that economic situations in the city were much better than those found by "exodusters" who traveled westward.³⁹

Analysis of multiple sources provides a glimpse into the city's African American work ethic and business life for those who stayed in Wilmington. Although the city directories of the 1880s and 1890s

are incomplete in their listings, the volumes do provide a wealth of information regarding black business ownership as well as employment and housing trends.⁴⁰ Further detail on the financial situation of the city's black population can be gleaned from tax and census records as well as other records generated by corporations and businesses.⁴¹

Beyond the simple capability to sustain growth, the African American community provided entrepreneurs with a base of capital from which to draw for new ventures, and Wilmington was regarded as a "relatively attractive business environment."⁴² New businesses were able to prosper and black ownership of businesses increased in sustainability in the span of a quarter century. By 1897, Wilmington boasted 24 rated black businesses in Dun's *Mercantile Agency Reference Book*.⁴³ A number of North Carolina towns were developing a black business class, but the climate that emerged in Wilmington moved beyond the norm of the other cities by the 1890s.⁴⁴ Many

³⁸ Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 44 – 48; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 98; *Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of North Carolina, September Term, 1897*, 172-183.

³⁹ Correspondence and newspaper articles from 1889 and 1890 indicate that many blacks who left for greater prosperity out west found low wages, substandard housing, and inflated prices for goods and services. Indications for those who remained in the city were that their situations were much better than anywhere else. Demonstrative of a break between African American economic classes, upper-class blacks such as politicians, ministers, and businessmen opposed migration whereas illiterate and semi-literate laborers were eager for the chance at a new life. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 274-281; Frenise A. Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 132.

⁴⁰ The city directories often list only heads of households whereas the census recorded the names of all men, women and children. For example, Leon Prather points out that the 1897 city directory featured 3,759 names for blacks living in the city whereas the 1890 census recorded 11,324 black residents in the city that year. Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 31. For further analysis of directory shortcomings, see Cody, "After the Storm," 95-99.

⁴¹ Detailed statistical and comparative analysis of the city's population before and after the riot will be found in Chapter 8.

⁴² Robert Kenzer, *Enterprising Southerners: Black Economic Success in North Carolina, 1865-1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 43-47, 65.

⁴³ Hayumi Higuchi, "White Supremacy on the Cape Fear: The Wilmington Affair of 1898," (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1980), 105.

⁴⁴ Frenise Logan studied reference books from the Mercantile Association of the Carolinas over several decades and noted that Wilmington's increases in the